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Montenegro

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I. Methodology and consultative process

1. This report was prepared in line with the guidelines of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/DEC/17/119). It gives an overview of the human rights situation and progress achieved since the third cycle, with special focus on the progress made in the implementation of recommendations after submission of the Mid-Term Report (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/upr-implementation>).

2. The document preparation process involved several rounds of consultations in which national authorities (ministries and administration bodies, judiciary and prosecution service), the Parliament, national institution of the Protector of Human Rights, civil sector and the UN system in Montenegro took part.

II. Normative and institutional framework for promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms – progress during the reporting period (2018–2022)

3. Montenegro undertook significant activities aimed at strengthening the normative and institutional framework. Detailed information is provided in the national report on the human rights situation, submitted under UPR cycles (A/HRC/WG.6/3/MNE/1, A/HRC/WG.6/15/MNE/1 and A/HRC/WG.6/29/MNE/1), as well as in the Mid-Term report. Activities aimed at strengthening administrative and expert capacities, establishing better coordination and monitoring of activities conducted by relevant ministries responsible for promotion and protection of human rights, as well as efficient functioning of established working groups and the institution of the Protector of Human Rights were also implemented during the reporting period. Novelties in the normative framework are presented for specific areas in section III.

A. Institutional framework (105.2, 105.7, 105.8, 105.9, 105.10, 105.60, 105.61, 105.66, 105.111, 105.142)

4. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights is the key governmental institution for creating policies for protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms.

5. The Government ensures monitoring of the implementation of national policies through working bodies responsible for specific areas of human rights protection: Council for the Rule of Law, Council for the Rights of the Child, Social Council, Council for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Judicial Reform Strategy 2019-2022. The Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is also being established.

6. The following were set up: Operational team for the fight against domestic violence and violence against women, Operational Team for the fight against human trafficking and the Team for formal identification of victims of human trafficking.

7. In priority areas of public interest, the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations allocates financial resources from the budget of Montenegro for projects and programmes of non-governmental organizations involved in protection and promotion of human rights.

8. As a form of national mechanism for reporting on recommendations and implementation monitoring, a network of working groups was established by thematic areas in the domain of human rights. In addition to the Government, representatives of the Protector of Human Rights, Parliament, NGO sector, judiciary and Prosecution Service are also part of those groups.

9. A new Commission tasked to monitor actions of competent authorities in investigations of cases of threats and violence against journalists, murders of journalists and attacks on media property was formed, with enhanced responsibilities, and better representation of relevant institutions.

10. The Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Freedoms discusses proposed laws and other regulations and general acts related to protection of human rights and freedoms and holds regular consultative hearings with authorities responsible for the implementation of anti-discrimination policies.

11. The role of the Protector to launch initiatives aimed at promoting human rights of the most vulnerable groups, especially children, as well as protecting the rights of migrants and asylum seekers in cooperation with international partners was strengthened. The electronic database for handling complaints filed to the Protector was improved. Based on the internal legal act of the institution of the Protector, and in line with the recommendations of relevant international organizations, its human resource and administrative capacities were strengthened.

B. Education and training on human rights (105.97)

12. The level of discrimination in society is monitored through continuous annual surveys. National policies are designed and trainings are conducted following their results to strengthen the capacities of all those responsible for implementing anti-discriminatory policies.

13. Special attention is paid to education and training on human rights, through regular education system and special training programmes for employees of public authorities.

14. Activities to strengthen capacities for the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation are carried out continuously. Numerous trainings on the topic of protection of all vulnerable social groups against discrimination were conducted during reporting period for representatives of state institutions, organizations involved in human rights protection, lawyers, judges, employees of the Public Prosecution Service, representatives of local self-governments, students, expert assistants and teaching staff in primary and secondary schools, media representatives, as well as trainings about the preparation of local self-governments' action plans.

15. Gender equality training for civil servants was designed to ensure a horizontal approach to mainstreaming gender in implementation of national policies. A Mandatory Training Plan on this topic was created for newly employed civil servants, managers, participants in Professional Training Programme, and strategic planning officers.

16. Training about prevention and protection against domestic violence is regularly attended by all officers and civil servants in contact with victims. In addition, police officers attend continuous trainings to properly apply legal provisions in the field of domestic violence and the model of protection for victims of domestic violence.

17. The Protector of Human Rights is continuously improving the training system in all areas of protection, with special emphasis on prevention and protection against torture and protection against discrimination.

18. Judicial and public prosecutor office holders are regularly trained to improve their knowledge and skills in line with principles of independence and autonomy and ethical standards of the profession.

19. Continuous efforts are made to educate media representatives and sensitize them about reporting on gender issues, as well as on vulnerable categories in society.

C. International-law documents and cooperation with treaty bodies (105.1 and 106.4)

20. Montenegro became a party to the following international legal instruments from 2018 to 2022:

- Montenegro ratified Protocol 16 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

21. Consultations are underway between the competent authorities in Montenegro on the procedure to ratify the Kampala Amendment to the Rome Statute.

22. The second periodic report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is being drafted. The report will assess the level of compliance of national legislation with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

23. The UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children (November 2019), the UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children, including Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Other Child Sexual Abuse Material (September 2021), and the special advisor of UN General Secretary for the Prevention of Genocide (November 2021) visited Montenegro.

24. Several expert missions of the OSCE and the CoE visited Montenegro during reporting period.

III. Progress in realising and protecting human rights – implementation of recommendations, achieved results, activities and challenges

25. Within the third UPR cycle, Montenegro received 169 recommendations, out of which 159 have been accepted. Thirty-two have been fully implemented, while the implementation of remaining recommendations is underway. Majority of those entail continuous work on certain matters and cannot be considered uncompleted per se. Despite aspirations to implement them, five recommendations have not been implemented.

A. National laws, policies, strategies and initiatives

26. Montenegro has continued to strengthen its legislative framework to protect, promote and improve human rights. The Law on Same-sex Civil Partnerships was adopted, and procedure is underway to align relevant laws with this law, as well as with the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. Adoption of new laws in the field of media, protection of equality and prohibition of discrimination, social and child protection, and legal recognition of gender based self-determination is expected soon.

27. Strategies in the field of human rights, with accompanying action plans are continuously implemented, with special attention paid to the status of the most vulnerable groups.

28. Through its current strategic framework for key areas of human rights protection, and based on clear goals and indicators, Montenegro has improved: Judicial Reform Strategy 2019-2022, National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025, Strategy for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities from Discrimination and Promotion of Equality 2022-2027, Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2021-2025, Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking 2019-2024, Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023, the Inclusive Education Strategy 2019-2025, Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of LGBTI Persons 2019-2023, Minority Policy Strategy 2019-2023, National Employment Strategy 2021-2025, Strategy for the Development of the Social Protection System for the Elderly 2018-2022, Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021-2024, Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025.

29. The Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms, provides opinions and suggestions concerning changes in regulations with the aim of their improvement and better implementation. The institution of the Protector provided its opinions about amendments to the legislative framework governing the rights of persons with disabilities, minority rights and freedoms, and about election legislation reform.

1. Equality and non-discrimination (105.11, 105.12, 105.13, 105.14, 105.15, 106.5, 106.6)

30. The Government of Montenegro monitors progress in achieving equality and fighting discrimination by implementing measures to attain strategic goals. The Government remains

focused on protecting minority rights, encouraging development of culture and specific features of ethnic minorities and other minority national communities.

31. Operational funds for councils representing ethnic minorities and other minority groups and implementation of their programmes have been doubled through implementation of the 2018 Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms. Funds are allocated to the Fund for Protection and Realization of Minority Rights each year. As of 2018, funds have also been allocated for projects of non-governmental organizations aimed at supporting implementation of measures to achieve strategic goals.

32. Key objective of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians (RE) in Montenegro 2021-2025 is to improve their social, economic and legal status, by building an inclusive and open society based on fight against and elimination of all forms of discrimination, antigypsyism and poverty.

33. Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025 has confirmed the continuity of policy of enhancing gender equality and protection against discrimination based on sex and gender.

34. Gender Equality Index for Montenegro was presented for the first time in early 2020. This index is an indicator of equality in domains of knowledge, work, money, power, health and time, and as such represents a significant step forward in efforts to achieve gender equality and improve women's status.

35. The Strategy for Protection of Persons with Disabilities against Discrimination and Promotion of Equality 2022-2027 highlighted the issue of women and children with disabilities, in line with recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Activities aimed at improving inclusion of children with disabilities are implemented continuously; visits to day-care centres, cooperation with parents' associations is strengthened to design activities aimed at greater visibility and inclusion of children with disabilities social life.

36. The quality of life of LGBTI persons has significantly improved in the past 10 years, confirmed by the adoption of new legislation in this field. In this area, Montenegro has been recognized as a leader in the region.

37. Regular evaluations of implementation of action plans accompanying strategies in the field of human rights indicate the need to further strengthen awareness about the importance of tolerance, understanding human rights and respect for diversity. Continuous efforts to prevent discrimination and raise awareness through campaigns on prohibition of discrimination against the most vulnerable social groups are being undertaken.

38. Anti-trafficking campaigns and dissemination and promotion of multilingual posters on this topic at all border crossings are also continuously carried out.

39. The medium-term programme of the Government of Montenegro 2022-2024 defines indicators for monitoring anti-discrimination policies showing the level of discrimination against vulnerable groups. The surveys on the level of discrimination are carried out in cooperation with the non-governmental sector with support of the Council of Europe and policies are designed in line with their results, to protect the most vulnerable social groups against discrimination.

40. Despite all the efforts, latest surveys indicate increased discrimination, which is, inter alia, a consequence of the current political and economic crisis. Results of most recent survey conducted in late 2022 show that the average level of discrimination for all vulnerable groups is highest in the field of employment and that the level of discrimination is the highest against RE population, according to citizens' perceptions. Compared to 2010, we recorded an increased level of discrimination based on sexual orientation, the level of discrimination against women decreased, and no significant changes were recorded with regard to persons with disabilities and RE.

41. The Government of Montenegro has worked continuously to strengthen the institutional framework, demonstrated by placing special focus on inter-culturalism and establishment of a separate organizational unit in the relevant ministry.

2. Fight against domestic violence and violence against women and children (104.7, 105.109–105.120)

42. Montenegro has continued to invest major efforts to eradicate gender-based violence.

43. The Operational Team for the fight against domestic violence and violence against women and the Committee for coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and fight all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention have been formed. Their goal is to strengthen coordination of institutions and establish joint practice on prevention, exchange of information, education, reporting and prosecution and protection of victims.

44. In line with the Istanbul Convention, four shelters for victims of violence have been licensed. During reporting period, 87 licenses were issued to service providers to conduct social and child protection activities, 43 out of which were issued to non-governmental organizations to provide the following services: counselling, therapy, day-care, personal assistance, help at home, SOS phone line, and accommodation in shelters.

45. The 2018 Protocol on Action, Prevention and Protection against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence is the overarching instrument for actions of competent institutions in cases of violence. It was designed to ensure efficient and quick protection of victims by relevant institutions. A single database was established in 2019 and it connects Centres for Social Work with the Police Administration. The protocol includes a separate section about protection of children against violence.

46. In line with the Istanbul Convention, CEDAW and recommendations of the GREVIO Committee, amendments to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code have been sent to the European Commission for their opinion. The definition of family was expanded, partner violence and same-sex partner violence were included, new criminal offences "revenge pornography" and sexual harassment were introduced, and criminal offence of rape and genital mutilation was broadened. These amendments also entail complete repositioning of physical and psychological violence into elements of a criminal offence.

47. Within the "16 Days of Activism to Fight Violence against Women" campaign, numerous activities are carried out to raise awareness about the problem of failure to report violence against women and girls, as well as citizens' awareness of importance of combating stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles of men and women.

48. During COVID-19 pandemic, the *Be Safe* application was designed. It sends an automatic message to the national SOS line in case of gender-based violence threat.

49. In line with the recommendation of the Council of Europe regarding prevention and suppression of sexism, the Code of Ethics for employees of the Institute for Execution of Criminal Sanctions (IECS) was adopted in 2019. It governs prevention and protection against sexual harassment. In 2022, the institution of Protector defined Guidelines for Elimination of Sexism in operations of that institution.

50. Most NGOs continuously conduct campaigns and organise workshops and trainings to raise awareness on sexual harassment, prevention and protection of women from violence. The Gender Equality Committee of the Parliament of Montenegro regularly organizes sessions of the Women's Parliament, as well as consultative and control hearings on different topics to additionally empower women.

51. Montenegro will continue to strive to achieve "zero tolerance" for violence against women and domestic violence.

3. Fight against human trafficking (105.64,105.66-105.80)

52. Montenegrin legislation is aligned with international standards in the field of combating human trafficking. Third National Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy 2019-2024 has been adopted, and its implementation is monitored by the broad membership Coordination Body, which includes representatives of national authorities, state administration bodies, judicial authorities, and the institution of the Protector, as well as two NGOs.

53. The Operational team for the fight against human trafficking (2018) is established to ensure more efficient processing of cases of human trafficking, coordination of activities and identification of victims of human trafficking; and the Team for formal identification of victims of human trafficking (2019), which shifted focus from prosecution-based approach to victim-oriented approach.

54. The 2020 National Plan for Formal Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking includes operational procedures for victim identification, protection and referral of persons presumed to be victims of human trafficking. From 2019 to 2022, the Police Administration filed 21 reports against 29 persons for criminal offence of human trafficking. The Prosecution Service brought 14 indictments against 23 persons, while courts passed 4 judgments against 5 persons for criminal offence of human trafficking, which marks significant progress compared to previous reporting period. Simultaneously, the Team for formal identification of victims of human trafficking identified 72 victims.

55. The guidelines on implementation of the provision on non-punishment of human trafficking victims, intended for police officers, public prosecutors and judges, were prepared in 2018. Guidelines for police officers on how to interview persons suspected to be human trafficking victims were prepared in 2021, and indicators for health workers were defined in 2022. All these activities are accompanied by trainings for civil servants and officers for their proper implementation.

56. Campaigns are conducted and include broadcasted video materials and distribution of multilingual posters at border crossings on the topic of combating human trafficking.

57. There is one licensed shelter for victims of human trafficking in Montenegro and is funded by the Government of Montenegro. In the period 2018–2022, 72 persons were taken care of in this shelter.

58. In line with the Law on Foreigners, permit for temporary residence for humanitarian reasons may also be issued to a foreigner who is presumed a victim of criminal offence of human trafficking, and accordingly, the foreigner is entitled to accommodation, health care, education, job and financial assistance. With an intent to raise awareness among foreigners seeking international protection and support their self-identification as victims of human trafficking, an informative brochure on rights and available services and assistance for victims of human trafficking was printed in 9 languages.

59. Following the initiative of the institution of the Protector, the Protocol on treatment of children living and working on the streets by authorities, institutions and organizations in Montenegro was signed. The Protocol was revised in 2021. Its implementation is monitored by the Coordination Body.

60. Montenegro is making efforts to strengthen regional cooperation in this field, confirmed by protocols on cooperation in the field of combating human trafficking and child abuse signed with North Macedonia (2018) and Slovenia (2021).

B. Civil and political rights – (democracy, rule of law, transparency, fight against impunity)

1. Election legislation reform (105.45)

61. The Parliamentary Committee for Comprehensive Electoral Reform was established in late 2020. The procedure for appointing members of the mentioned Committee is underway. However, during reporting period, the Committee's work was marked by the decision of some political parties, which made the opposition back then, not to participate, causing a delay in fulfilling recommendations from Resolution 2374 (2021) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe "Post-monitoring dialogue with Montenegro". Nevertheless, Committee's working groups held regular meetings dedicated to modalities for holding local elections in one day, as well as to specific provisions from the Law on Election of Local Councillors and Members of Parliament. In that sense, norms related to OSCE/ODIHR recommendations were analysed. Committee's working bodies also

worked on the Law on Registers of Permanent and Temporary Residence, as well as on analysis of the Law on Montenegrin Citizenship.

2. Judicial reform and fight against corruption (104.2, 105.32–105.40)

62. Judicial Reform Strategy 2019-2022 was adopted based on the guidelines and reports of international partners and assessments of progress during the EU membership negotiation process. Independence, impartiality, accountability and efficiency of the judiciary; accessibility, transparency and public trust in the judiciary; as well as further development of institutional capacities and alignment of the normative framework with the EU *acquis* will be strengthened through strategic goals.

63. The 2021 Law Amending the Law on the Public Prosecution Service significantly contributed to the elimination of political influence on the Public Prosecution Service and improvement of the Prosecutorial Council's operations. Provisions defining prevention of conflict of interest among PC members were introduced, strengthening its independence additionally. The new composition of the PC was also introduced.

64. With an intent to fight corruption and organized crime more effectively, the PC adopted the Decision on Modified Number of Public Prosecutors in 2018, which strengthened capacities of the Special Public Prosecutor's Office, by increasing the number of prosecutors from 10 to 12.

65. The Judicial Council and the Prosecutorial Council have continuously implemented the process of assessing performance of judges and public prosecutors. A disciplinary prosecutor and a disciplinary council have been appointed for the Judicial and Prosecutorial Council to improve disciplinary framework for judges and prosecutors. Trainings for judges and public prosecutors on the topic of disciplinary responsibility are regularly organised.

66. Due to the lack of political consensus, heads of key judicial institutions in Montenegro have not been elected (three members of the Judicial Council from the ranks of eminent lawyers, judges of the Constitutional Court, the supreme public prosecutor and the president of the Supreme Court).

67. The Law on Prevention of Corruption prescribes the obligation of judges and public prosecutors to declare their assets and income to the Agency for Prevention of Corruption within 30 days from the day of taking office, with a view to improve the implementation of anti-corruption policies. The codes of ethics for judges and public prosecutors have been adopted and trainings for them are regularly conducted. Commissions have also been formed to monitor compliance of judges and state prosecutors with codes of ethics.

68. The upwards trend in the number of submitted income and assets declarations has continued, as a result of enhanced information and training of public officials. A significant rise in the number of submitted separate declarations on increase of their assets has also been recorded.

69. To improve mechanisms of internal control and inspection within the public administration and to fight corruption effectively, Montenegrin authorities are required to adopt integrity plans, the efficiency and effectiveness of which are assessed every other year. They represent a set of measures preventing and eliminating possibilities for occurrence and development of various forms of corrupt and other unprofessional behaviour.

70. Representatives of the judiciary, prosecution service and the police continually attend trainings focused specifically on investigations of criminal offences of organized crime and high-level corruption - inter-agency cooperation, secret surveillance measures with an emphasis on violation of the right to privacy and protection of personal data, protection of whistle-blowers, financial and criminal investigations in cases involving criminal offences of money laundering, international norms to fight trafficking in cultural goods, modern investigative methods and international legal cooperation.

3. Protecting the rights of victims of crimes punishable by international law

71. In line with the War Crimes Investigation Strategy, the Special Public Prosecutor's Office files reports to the Supreme Public Prosecutor. During the reporting period, one final conviction was handed down for a war-crime-related criminal offence. In 2019, one defendant was found guilty and sentenced to 14 years in prison, for the criminal offence of war crimes against the civilian population under Art. 142 p. 1 of the Criminal Code of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).

72. In 2021, the Special Prosecutor's Office conducted preliminary investigations in seven cases of war crimes on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In one case, which refers to the request of Bosnia and Herzegovina for mutual legal assistance concerning one person, the competent authorities found that there was a reasonable doubt of a criminal offence. Another investigation was closed due to the lack of grounds for criminal prosecution. The work on the remaining five cases continues.

73. Montenegro has established good cooperation with neighbouring countries in these cases. The Special Public Prosecutor's Office processed 10 letters rogatory in 2021, as well as five letters rogatory from 2020. Good cooperation with the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Courts (IRMCT) has continued. As regards submitted case files concerning individuals who are believed to be Montenegrin citizens suspected of committing serious war crimes, one person has been interviewed as a witness and the exchange with the prosecution offices of Bosnia and Herzegovina has continued. Following recommendations of the IRMCT, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code are being drafted to proactively address legal and practical obstacles to the effective investigation, prosecution, trial and punishment of war crimes under international standards. Work has continued to introduce legal amendments that would enable Montenegro to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of conflict-related sexual violence.

74. In October 2021, the Higher Court in Podgorica confirmed the indictment against one suspect; the trial is currently underway. In June 2022, the Special Prosecutor's Office filed another indictment to the Higher Court in Podgorica.

75. During the reporting period, there were 30 pending requests for damages before the courts, all of them related to the "Camp Morinj" case. Of that number, 27 were fully or partially accepted, with a total awarded non-pecuniary damage of EUR 196,876.66. Proceedings in the three remaining cases are underway.

76. As regards civil proceedings in which courts were deciding on lawsuits for damages for victims of war crimes, 32 final judgments were handed down.

4. Freedom of expression and freedom of media (104.4–104.5, 105.46–105.63, 106.10–106.11)

77. Montenegro started drafting new Law on Media, Law on Public Media Service of Montenegro and Law on Audio-Visual Media Services in late 2021. The media legislation reform is based on relevant international recommendations, experiences with the implementation of media legislation, and requests and suggestions from the media community and the NGO sector.

78. The Law on Media will strengthen the basic principles of media freedom, freedom of expression, the public character of media ownership, transparency of advertising in the media, protection of media pluralism, editorial independence and other matters of importance for the work of the media. Of particular relevance is the establishment of the Fund for Encouraging Media Pluralism and Diversity, which finances the production of media content of public interest.

79. The Law on Public Broadcasting Service will strengthen further financial, institutional and political independence of the national public broadcaster. The law will specify further matters of conflict of interest of members of the Public Broadcasting Service Council.

80. The Law on Audio-visual Media Services will strengthen the independence of the regulator. The plan is to return several powers regarding imposition of fines on broadcasters for non-compliance with legal and professional standards to the remit of the Agency for Electronic Media.

81. The preparation of the Montenegro Media Strategy 2023-2027, the first strategic document of its kind, is underway. It will include several measures aimed at strengthening the safety of journalists and reinforcing all institutional mechanisms involved in processing all cases of attacks on journalists.

82. With an aim to align the national practice with the practice of the European Court of Human Rights as regards the application of Article 10 of the Convention, the Supreme Court of Montenegro prepared the Analyses of the European Court's Judgments related to Montenegro for 2018, 2019 and 2020, with an emphasis on the importance of application of the three-part test. During the reporting period, the courts heard 29 cases related to misdemeanours and criminal acts committed to the detriment of journalists, of which 19 cases were decided, and 17 were closed with final judgments.

83. Prosecutors' offices file reports about attacks on journalists to the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office. The Police Administration has appointed a chief police inspector who coordinates all prosecutorial and police activities in this field on the entire territory of Montenegro. Also, two criminal police inspectors have been appointed in each regional centre of the police force and they are responsible for these activities on the territories under their jurisdiction, regardless of whether the reported event contains elements of criminal offence or misdemeanour. The Commission for Monitoring Investigations of Attacks on Journalists was formed with a new composition in 2021. It now includes journalists and representatives of media, NGOs, the Association of Professional Journalists, the Media Council for Self-Regulation, the Media Union, the National Security Agency, the Public Prosecution Service and the Police Administration. Different Commission composition has made it more efficient, given that representatives of the Prosecution Service are now directly involved in this body. A particularly important duty of the new Commission involves monitoring cases that occur on social networks, in addition to identified attacks and threats.

84. During the reporting period, the Commission identified several shortcomings related, inter alia, to delays in investigations, the absence of a single record of cases of attacks on journalists, and the unavailability of secret data for all its members.

85. The unanimously adopted amendments to the Criminal Code in 2021 strengthened the criminal justice-related protection of journalists.

86. A single external self-regulatory body has not been established yet. In addition to the Media Council for Self-Regulation, there are several internal self-regulatory bodies in Montenegro.

5. Fight against torture (104.1, 105.20–105.31, 106.7–106.9)

87. The draft law amending the Criminal Code of Montenegro has been aligned with the 2018 UN Recommendation from the UPR the obsolescence of torture and ill-treatment. The draft law introduced the mandatory imposition of a security measure prohibiting official persons from performing their jobs, activities and duties, but it also prevented the imposition of a warning measure for cases of torture as premeditated criminal offences.

88. Amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid are being drafted. Victims of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment will be identified as preferential beneficiaries of the right to free legal aid.

89. The annual reports on the fulfilment of recommendations of the Council for Civil Control of the Police indicate an exceptionally high level of their implementation. From 2018 to 2022, the Department for Internal Control of the Police conducted control in 32 reported cases of some form of police torture. In total, 27 police officers were criminally and disciplinary sanctioned. In cases in which the presence of disciplinary responsibility of police officers could not be proven unquestionably, the reports produced within internal control procedures were forwarded to the competent prosecutor's offices for further procedural actions.

90. The courts handed down 14 final judgments in total, of which convictions in 7 cases, acquittals in 6 cases, while in one case the judgment was to reject the indictment.

91. In its role as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), the Protector visits authorities and institutions every year based on the Work Plan. These visits include control monitoring of institutions holding persons deprived of their liberty and persons whose movement is restricted. During their tours, members of the NPM have unlimited access to all official premises and documentation, as well as the possibility of conducting confidential interviews with persons deprived of their liberty, detained and persons remanded in custody.

92. National trainers have been trained through a series of training events for judges and public prosecutors, with the participation of police representatives, on the prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment. According to the Law on the Execution of Prison Sentences, due to the specific nature of the jobs, IECS has implemented more complex recruitment procedures compared to employees in other public administration authorities.

93. There were no complaints about the conditions in detention facilities in police regional centres during the reporting period.

94. Activities were also undertaken to improve living conditions and reduce the overcrowding of spatial capacities where persons deprived of liberty stay. In this regard, the implementation of the project to construct a prison for the northern region of Montenegro is underway.

95. Persons deprived of their liberty are entitled to health care, which is additionally improved in line with the revised Instruction on the Health Care of Prisoners from 2019.

96. The construction of a Special Prison Hospital is planned to improve the health care, with a focus on mental health.

97. In case of any suspicion of a mental illness, based solely on the report of a specialist psychiatrist, the patient can be hospitalized in the Special Psychiatric Hospital.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights, social inclusion (104.3, 105.88–105.93)

98. Montenegro has adopted new National Employment Strategy 2021-2025. The goal is to achieve stable and sustainable employment growth, based on equal access to the labour market, dignified work, further development of knowledge and skills, and greater social inclusion. Special emphasis is placed on improving the status of unemployed persons, through efficiency of services for the labour market and active employment measures, as well as on strengthening social inclusion and reducing poverty. The focus is on the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

99. In line with Strategy for the Development of the Social Protection System for the Elderly People 2018-2022, day-care services for adults and elderly people with disabilities have been developed. The objective is to support life in the community and ensure better availability of health services, i.e. improve the overall status of this category of the population. The results of the implementation of the Strategy are already visible, and an increase in the number of elderly beneficiaries who use support services for life in the community has been recorded. Services have been improved by increasing the number of licenses for service providers for the elderly to perform social protection activities. The assistance at-home service is continuously implemented. The following services were introduced: placement in the shelter for homeless people within the old-age home for the elderly; a refuge for homeless people in the Capital City; personal assistance service; placement in the shelter for adults and elderly victims of violence; an SOS phone service for adult and elderly victims of violence, and counselling services were introduced in many municipalities.

100. Legislation in the field of culture is aligned with international standards. Participation in cultural life is based on equal preservation of all cultural identities and respect for cultural diversity.

101. According to Youth Strategy 2017-2022, activities aimed at improving the culture of youth participation in decision-making processes were continuously carried out, by co-

financing youth NGOs, opening youth services, implementing *European Youth Card* programme aimed at the development of youth activism, and youth networking through cooperation with the civil sector.

102. The safeguarding of cultural rights related to the use and creation of cultural content of persons with disabilities is effectively implemented. Significant efforts are being made to make facilities accessible for people with disabilities, to adapt cultural content to adequate formats, as well as to provide support in public calls for projects that are implemented, inter alia, by people with disabilities. Special efforts are made to facilitate the attainment of professional titles for persons with disabilities in the culture sector.

103. Efforts are made to improve the quality of public health care services for groups in particularly vulnerable situations. Electronic services for patients in the field of healthcare have been improved (e-Pharmacy, e-Prescription, e-Results, e-Insurance, e-Ordering, e-Appointments).

D. Individual rights

1. Women (104.6, 105.42, 105.43, 105.91, 105.98–105.108)

104. The evident progress has been made in achieving gender equality and empowering women between 2017–2021. The practical experience has shown that, despite legal norms and some progress in certain areas, institutions are not yet able to protect women and persons of different sexual orientation and gender identities against discrimination effectively. Public policies are not sufficiently gender-sensitive, even though Law on Gender Equality requires it. All identified deficiencies have been addressed through three operational objectives of the fourth National Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025, with a view to contribute to their elimination.

105. The main objective of the strategy is to improve implementation of the existing normative framework, as well as implementation of measures that strengthen capacities of institutional mechanisms for enforcement of legal provisions governing protection against discrimination, the establishment of more efficient and effective coordination, and oversight of implementation and reporting. Responsible entities have allocated funds for implementation of planned activities.

106. The Gender Equality Index was calculated for Montenegro for the first time in 2020. It showed that the greatest imbalance in Montenegro was present in the domain of money and power and indicated the need to intensify activities aimed at strengthening women in the economic and political sphere.

107. The strategy of Women's Entrepreneurship 2021-2024 focuses on overcoming structural, economic and infrastructural barriers for further improvement of women's entrepreneurship.

108. Specific support measures have been introduced to improve competitiveness of the economy and increase the number of business entities majority-owned by women.

109. Within efforts to increase the representation of women in political and public life, activities have focused on amending the electoral legislation. Amendments were prepared to increase the quota to 40%. Some amendments were also included in Law on Financing Political Parties and Election Campaigns, which was adopted in 2019.

110. In its updated Rules of Procedure from 2020, the Parliament of Montenegro prescribed that at least one deputy speaker has to be elected from the ranks of the less represented gender. Women's Caucus has been formed as an informal parliamentary body coordinated by MPs from different parties.

111. Women in the Parliament currently account for 27.2% of the total number of MPs, which means that the quota set by the CEDAW recommendations has not been reached. In the Parliament of Montenegro, both the speaker and deputy speaker, whose position is reserved for a candidate of the less represented gender, are women.

112. The Law on the Government is currently being drafted. It will set the quotas as regards the composition of the Government.

113. The reform of the legislation governing protection against gender-based violence has been initiated. It covers Law on Free Legal Aid, Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, Law on Damages to Victims of Criminal Offences of Violence, Criminal Code, etc.

114. The preparation of new media laws, which will include a gender perspective, is underway.

115. The Alimony Fund, which will facilitate regular payment of alimony to children, was established in 2022 based on the Law on Temporary Child Support.

116. Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025 is focused on implementing clearly defined activities aimed at changing measurable indicators. Within the process of establishing the commission to oversee its implementation, its members attended trainings to acquire necessary skills for efficient monitoring and reporting in line with the indicators.

117. The topic of horizontal mainstreaming of the gender perspective into all strategic goals in the public administration system and its functioning is defined in Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022-2026.

118. An instrument was designed as a tool for the preparation of strategic public policies. This instrument is included in the new methodology for the preparation and monitoring of reporting of all government documents.

119. Montenegro has initiated the process of gender-responsive budgeting. The institutions are requested to include gender indicators in their budget planning and inform about them.

120. A road map for making effective policies for women in business has been prepared. A national online platform for women in business has been established, with all the information on relevant support programs.

121. A Gender Map platform was created. The platform presents the status of women and men in Montenegrin society innovatively. A campaign was conducted in 2021 to eradicate traditional attitudes, which limit women's opportunities for engagement in political and public life.

122. Surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 showed that employees in the public administration do not possess sufficient knowledge about making public policies gender-sensitive. An online platform to train employees in public administration and public communications to make public policies gender sensitive, was created in 2021.

123. Intending to prohibit abortion based on the sex of the foetus and establish assistance services for women who feel pressured to carry out abortions for this reason, the Law on Conditions and Procedures for Termination of Pregnancy prohibits termination of pregnancy and the use of early genetic tests to determine sex up to the tenth week of pregnancy, except when there are risks of hereditary diseases. The law governs in detail the procedure for termination of pregnancy for both adults and minors. Public health institutions act according to the Instruction, which prohibits all prenatal sex identification testing. This has fully taken root in the public sector. However, there is still no possibility to perform adequate control of the private sector, because they are not yet connected electronically.

2. Children (105.81, 105.87, 105.95, 105.96, 105.121–105.125, 106.12)

124. The 2020 Labour Law prohibits the employment of persons convicted of offences of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.

125. The Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the Child 2019-2023 was adopted. It is a comprehensive and interdepartmental document focusing on the improvement of conditions for exercising children's rights in all areas covered by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols. The Strategy also includes the plan to construct a Barnahus – Children's Home, where forensic interviews and medical examinations of children victims of sexual abuse will be conducted.

126. The 2019-2025 Inclusive Education Strategy focuses on early development, i.e. support for children in preschool institutions. Children with disabilities are enrolled in preschools free of charge, and schools hire teaching assistants as technical support for children with special educational needs. For these children to adapt, a transition programme from kindergarten to primary school, from primary to secondary school, as well as the subsequent one, which connects enrolment at university and employment, has been made. Resource centres play a significant role in the education of children with special educational needs. In Montenegro, there are three resource centres and 17 day-care centres for children with disabilities, and they meet the needs of those children at the level of Montenegro.

127. As for the institutional framework for protecting children's rights, the Council for the Rights of the Child, chaired by the Prime Minister from 2022, has continued with its work, and the Secretariat has been established to perform professional and administrative tasks for the Council.

128. In 2018, the service *Shelter for Protection of Children from Domestic Violence* and the national children's phone line were introduced at the Children's Home "Mladost" in Bijela, which is also the only institution for children without parental care in Montenegro. The possibility of extracting electronic records of persons convicted of crimes against the sexual freedom of children and minors was introduced in 2018.

129. Montenegro is in the group of about 50 countries of the world that have explicitly banned corporal punishment of children. Training programmes have been designed and implemented to change attitudes that support violence, accept corporal punishment and other harmful traditional practices, gender stereotypes, and racial or ethnic discrimination. Activities implemented by non-governmental organisations as partners in projects directly contributed to the achievement of measures and goals from the National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children against Violence 2017-2021. Many training events for professionals from the social and child protection system were organised on the topic of children victims of domestic violence, on the vulnerability of children in institutions and day-care centres to violence, and there are plans to draft a new Strategy for the Protection of Children against Violence for the period 2023-2027.

130. There is a plan to draft a new Law on Social and Child Protection, the adoption of which is expected in 2023, to harmonize the social protection programme with the needs of vulnerable categories of the population.

131. Montenegro, in cooperation with international partners, conducts campaigns on child/arranged marriages, domestic violence and street begging to raise awareness about forced unions or child or forced marriages in Roma and Egyptian communities.

132. The efforts of the Operational Team for Combating Human Trafficking have led to an increase in the number of prosecutions and convictions.

133. The Program for Suppression of Peer Violence and Vandalism in Educational Institutions in Montenegro 2019-2021 was implemented. During the 2020/2021 school year, data from the Montenegrin Education Information System (MEIS) on the number of cases of all forms of violence, perpetrators and victims were analysed, groups of primary and secondary schools were formed and trained and preventive actions were also carried out in schools. This year, the Ministry of Education organised instructional meetings with the principals of all primary schools regarding prevention and treatment. An analysis of data on the situation with violence in schools was prepared based on the data from MEIS, priorities were identified, and topics for training events to strengthen the preventive competencies of school personnel were defined.

3. Persons with disabilities (105.85, 105.86, 105.96, 105.138-105.142, 106.13)

134. The compliance of the 2020 Labour Law with international standards and national legal framework provided the conditions for successful and professional rehabilitation, increased employment of persons with disabilities and their equal participation in the labour market, with the elimination of barriers and exercise of equal rights. Special attention was paid to the financing of projects that supported the employment of persons with disabilities with the aim of their greater inclusion in the labour market.

135. Harmonization of national legislation in the field of human rights protection and protection of persons with disabilities against discrimination has continued based on the Analysis of Alignment of the National Legislation with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. Thirty-four analysed laws, out of 59, received recommendations for harmonization, and 9 have been harmonized so far, while amendments to the laws on patients' rights, on the treatment of infertility with assisted reproductive technologies, on the protection and exercise of the rights of mentally ill persons, and transport privileges for persons with disabilities are being drafted.

136. The Law on Consolidated Disability Assessment is being drafted. It will serve as a basis for the adoption of a register of persons with disabilities.

137. The Decision on the establishment of the Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2021. The Council will improve the rights of persons with disabilities in the field of health, social and child protection, education, job training and employment, accessibility, anti-discrimination and sports. Due to structural changes in the composition of the Government, provision of the conditions for the establishment of this body is underway.

138. The Final Report indicated the need for further identification and removal of all factors that cause unequal social conditions and status of persons with disabilities. The need to strengthen the conditions for equal participation of women and girls with disabilities and children with disabilities in community life was also recognized.

139. The Strategy for Protection of Persons with Disabilities against Discrimination and Promotion of Equality 2022-2027 puts emphasis primarily on the effective suppression of all forms of discrimination and the creation of conditions for equal enjoyment of human rights in all spheres of life for persons with disabilities. The document covers women and girls with disabilities and children with disabilities and considers in particular the vulnerability of their status in the society and specific requirements they face.

140. The 2019-2025 Inclusive Education Strategy improves the availability, equality and quality of inclusive education through school policies, cultures and practices. Based on the analysis of individual development and education programmes submitted by educational institutions and based on a conducted survey, this programme has been improved for preschool institutions, primary and secondary schools and classes organised according to a special programme. A support programme has been designed for the adaptation and transition of children in primary schools from classroom to subject-based teaching and to address the challenges of adolescence. A model of accessible format has been created and counselling has been organised for IT coordinators in all schools. In cooperation with day-care centres, additional professional support is provided to children from kindergartens and elementary schools.

141. The relevance of the institution of Protector as an institutional mechanism for the protection of these persons against discrimination has been recognized. 90 cases were pending before the Protector about disability-based discrimination during the reporting period. An increase in complaints was recorded during this period compared to the previous one, which is proof of greater trust in and visibility of this institution.

142. In 2022, the institution of Protector initiated the creation of an independent monitoring mechanism, with a particularly pronounced concept of inclusion of the civil sector advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. The procedure to establish a network to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is underway.

4. Minorities and Roma (105.94, 105.126–105-137)

143. In the institutional and legislative sense, Montenegro strives to ensure an integrated approach to minorities, through implementation of the strategic and normative framework for the protection of their rights. National Strategy of Minority Policy 2019-2023 defines institutional solutions, i.e. operational structure and functional representation of all stakeholders in the implementation process.

144. Significant funds are regularly allocated to institutions involved in the improvement and promotion of minority rights, to preserve and develop culture, education and disseminate information in the languages of ethnic minorities and other minority national communities. Project activities are used to continuously work to promote the importance of mutual tolerance and coexistence, inter-ethnic dialogue, specific features of national culture, and history and art of minorities.

145. Ensuring proportional participation and representation of members of ethnic minorities and other minority national communities in the political and public life of Montenegro is also important for exercising rights guaranteed to them, as well as for their participation in making and implementing national policies. With the activation of the first Roma political party in 2021 (established in 2019) in the local elections in Podgorica, the Roma community became an active factor in creating the political environment in Montenegro.

146. In 2021, the Government of Montenegro adopted the Brief on the representation of ethnic minorities and other minority national communities in local self-government bodies, companies and public institutions, founded by the Capital City, Royal Capital or municipality. The acquired data indicate an increase in representation compared to the previous period, but also room for further improvement.

147. A multidisciplinary approach and full commitment to compliance with the constitutional principle of all relevant entities are necessary to improve proportional representation.

148. The complexity of the process of inclusion of Roma and Egyptians requires a multidisciplinary and long-term approach. The implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 provided guidelines for subsequent strategic policy in this field. The key goal of the new Strategy (2021-2025) is to build an inclusive and open society based on the fight against and elimination of all forms of discrimination, antigypsyism and poverty.

149. The strategy covers all areas that are essential for addressing issues faced by this population, and those are discrimination, poverty, political and social participation, housing, education, health, civil status and personal documents, and social and family protection. A national coordinator has also been appointed to monitor the strategy.

150. The number of students from these communities in the education system is constantly increasing at all levels of education, and activities that are carried out in that regard are aimed at eliminating segregation and at encouraging students to continue to secondary education and academic studies. The Government of Montenegro provides scholarships for them, at the secondary education and university level, while preschool education is free of charge, as well as textbooks for primary education.

151. By recruiting mediators to facilitate children's access to learning, and in cooperation with teachers and professional services, the quality of their education has been improved. There is still a clear gap between the number of children in primary and secondary education, and an insufficiently developed awareness of the importance of education as a result of the poor social and economic situation they are in. Efforts are made to include as many mediators in the fields of education, health and social inclusion as possible. There are 22 assistants involved in the field of education, and 43 mediators were trained for the fields of employment, social and health care. Mediators are recruited through time-limited projects, and they need to be fully included in the system for an indefinite period.

152. Montenegro is a member of numerous regional initiatives within which activities are implemented to eliminate the vulnerability of categories of the population at risk of human trafficking.

153. Efforts are made continuously to raise awareness of parents and children, Roma and Egyptian activists, about protection against domestic violence, violence against women and child marriages among Roma.

154. The practice of arranged child marriages in Roma and Egyptian communities continues to be a cause for concern. Eighteen such marriages were recorded during the

reporting period. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, the revision of the Criminal Code should include raising of the minimum age for marriage from 16 to 18.

155. Employment remains one of the biggest challenges considering general issues these communities face. Around 96% of Roma registered as unemployed at the Employment Office have the lowest level of education, while less than 1% completed secondary education, which significantly narrows employment opportunities. In mid-2022, they accounted for 2.6% of the total number of unemployed persons in Montenegro registered by the Employment Office. Seasonal employment programmes are organized continuously but are limited when it comes to long-term effects.

156. The legal status of internally displaced persons from the RE population has mostly been addressed. The plan is that all persons completely solve the issue of their civil status and personal documents by the end of 2023.

157. Educative events, workshops, and training on social equality of Roma and Egyptians, and the fight against antigypsyism and forced marriages are regularly organised.

5. Refugees, displaced and internally displaced persons (105.143)

158. The 2018 Law on Foreigners allowed displaced and internally displaced persons to attain the status of a foreigner with permanent residence in Montenegro, under preferential conditions, as a measure of a permanent solution for their status. These persons are allowed to integrate into Montenegrin society and exercise their rights to work and employment, education, professional training, recognition of diplomas and certificates, social assistance, health and pension insurance, tax benefits, access to the labour market and services, freedom of association, association and membership in organizations that represent the interests of workers or employers.

159. The Strategy of Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025 will shape the national migration policy following the best practices in the field of legal migration, asylum, prevention of irregular migration, readmission, return, integration, internally displaced persons and statelessness. This strategic document provides a permanent resolution of the status of internally displaced persons.

160. Displaced persons and internally displaced persons filed 15,260 requests in total from November 2009–October 2022 for approval of permanent residence and temporary residence for up to three years. Of this number, 15,146 requests were decided, while 114 requests are still pending.

161. The regional housing program for Montenegro allocated funds to address housing issues for 6,063 persons (persons housed in informal collective centres and vulnerable persons in private housing). Of this number, the housing issue has been solved for more than 5,000 persons so far, and it is currently being solved for other persons. The largest informal camp in Montenegro was closed in December 2018 with the construction of 171 housing units for the residents of Camp Konik in Podgorica.

162. There were no organized returns of displaced and internally displaced persons during the reporting period. The declining interest in recent years is an outcome of the successful integration of these persons into Montenegrin society, through provision of a solution for their legal status, full access to social and economic rights, as well as a successful solution of housing issues for these persons.

163. The challenge we face in our work as regards displaced and internally displaced persons is their registration in the registers and getting documents in these persons' countries of origin.

6. Reduction of statelessness (105.144)

164. The Law on Montenegrin Citizenship addresses matters of avoiding statelessness, preventing arbitrary deprivation of citizenship, preventing discrimination and the right to citizenship.

165. Montenegro has created all the necessary conditions for the registration of all persons born on its territory in the Birth Register. The Law on Non-litigious Procedure allows registration in the Register for persons born outside the health care system, and the practice has made it possible to register those persons whose one or both parents do not have an identification document or when children are abandoned by their mother.

166. The new Law on Foreigners from 2018 established a procedure for determination of the status of statelessness. Statelessness was determined for 9 persons by October 2022. The procedure for determining statelessness is pending for 15 persons.

167. All persons who submitted a request for determination of statelessness received assistance through a free legal aid programme financed by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and implemented by local NGOs.

168. Training events for officials responsible for the application of the Law on Foreigners in the field of statelessness are regularly organized.

169. New Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro 2021-2025 includes a comprehensive analysis of the national legislation in the field of social and economic rights for stateless persons. The amendments to the Law on Foreigners define in more detail the procedure for determination of statelessness, and rights and obligations during the procedure of recognition the statelessness.

170. When it comes to reducing statelessness, the practice shows that it takes a while to get a response to requests for verification of citizenship from countries that the applicant for determination of statelessness is connected. Unfortunately, those responses are not always entirely accurate and contain only the fact that the person is not registered in the Register of Citizens (RC) and make no reference to the other facts stated in the initial inquiry and whether the person meets the conditions for registration in the RC on any of the legal grounds.

7. LGBTI persons (105.16–105.19, 105.82–105.83)

171. Montenegro has a strong normative and strategic framework protecting the human rights of LGBTI persons.

172. More than 20 life partnerships have been registered since the beginning of the implementation of the Law on Same-sex Civil Partnerships (2021). This represents a big step in the right direction for Montenegrin society. The new Law on Protection of Equality and Prohibition of Discrimination and the Law on Legal Gender Recognition Based on Self-Determination, which are currently being drafted, will complete the legal framework protecting the human rights of LGBTI persons in Montenegro.

173. Montenegro is implementing the second Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of LGBTI persons 2019-2023 in three crucial areas: social acceptance of LGBTI persons; safety and protection of human rights of LGBTI persons; access to work, services and support services. The implementation is based on the principle of sectoral responsibility of relevant institutions for defined goals.

174. The Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of LGBTI Persons in Montenegro 2019-2023 systematically defines goals, measures and activities required to improve respect for the human right of LGBTI persons to a dignified life.

175. As for cases of violence against LGBTI persons, data on all reported and processed cases of discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons are gathered on an annual basis.

176. An analysis of the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation was also conducted during the reporting period. It highlighted numerous challenges faced by judicial authorities and other relevant institutions while processing cases in which LGBTI persons are the injured party. The analysis offered recommendations and guidelines for better and more efficient implementation of laws to contribute to an effective fight against hate crimes and hate speech targeting this vulnerable social group.

177. The Team of Trust was formed to strengthen cooperation between the Police Administration and the LGBTI community. A network of trained police officers for contact

with LGBTI persons was established, which further strengthened the safety of LGBTI persons. This network includes all police centres/offices in the country.

178. The tenth pride parade in Montenegro was organized in October 2022. The event took place without special security measures, which is an indicator of society's progress in terms of tolerance and respect for diversity.

179. The contribution of non-governmental organizations stands out in the overall protection and improvement of LGBTI persons' status, in strengthening their social inclusion and quality policy-making in this field.

IV. Priorities, initiatives and commitments in addressing challenges in the implementation of recommendations and strengthening of human rights protection

180. In line with the recommendations of the third UPR cycle and given the current membership in the Human Rights Council (2022-2024), Montenegro has continued to strengthen its institutional and legislative framework in the field of protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The activities that have been undertaken in this field reflect clearly our orientation towards democratic values, ensuring prosperity and a better future for all citizens.

181. The challenges that Montenegrin society faces were also recognized through implementation of the recommendations, and efforts will be intensified to further strengthen the institutional framework and ensure full implementation of laws. Along with the strengthening of the national dialogue on human rights and broader participation of the civil sector, measures will be taken that will enable greater equality, with a special emphasis on vulnerable categories of society. In that sense, our efforts will focus on greater inclusion of the RE population in the education system, with a special emphasis on preschool education, as well as on intensification of activities to improving conditions in the field of employment and abolition of minor and arranged marriages, through a regional approach.

182. Despite significant efforts to complete the normative framework governing the fight against all forms of discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices in Montenegrin society, and the occurrence of sexism and misogyny in particular, the challenges that still exist for its full implementation have been identified. The work on more efficient implementation of the legal framework will be intensified through gender equality mainstreaming into the overall operation of public administration.

183. Adoption of the Law on Civil Same-Sex Partnerships in July 2020 represents a major step forward for Montenegrin society. More intensive efforts will be made to harmonize regulations with the mentioned law to fully implement it. In the field of protection against discrimination of persons with disabilities, work will be intensified to create conditions for equal enjoyment of human rights in all spheres of life for persons with disabilities.

184. Numerous activities are carried out to improve social and economic status of refugees and displaced persons, with a special focus on education, health care, social protection and housing.

185. The progress presented in the report clearly showed challenges and obligations that must be fulfilled to strengthen the system of protection and enjoyment of human rights and freedoms, in line with the highest values of democracy and the principles proclaimed in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international legal documents in these fields.

186. At international level, Montenegro will continue to cooperate closely with the Human Rights Council, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and with holders of special procedures, who have a standing invitation to visit Montenegro and its institutions.